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October 13, 2010

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Mr. Gene L. Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) assess the policies and procedures used by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) in conducting research on comparative effectiveness. AHRQ has the power to gather evidence on the benefits or harms of treatment options, and to provide results on what AHRQ believes is the most effective manner of treatment. Moreover, under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA), AHRQ will play an integral role in public health policies and will affect the future reimbursement rates for Medicare and Medicaid.

I believe it is important to review the procedures AHRQ uses in researching and recommending the most effective methods of medical treatment. Because the PPACA gives AHRQ vast new responsibilities, I also believe that it is important to analyze how AHRQ has dealt with large legislative implementation in the past and how it plans to address the PPACA.

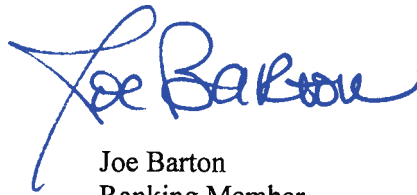
I would like GAO to analyze the following:

1. In February 2009, Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which allocated a substantial amount of money for comparative effectiveness research. I would like the GAO to examine the use of these stimulus funds by AHRQ. In particular, I would like information on the topics researched and the recommendations that have been or will be made because of research conducted with these funds.
2. The PPACA contains a number of references to AHRQ and comparative effectiveness research. Specifically, Sections 6301 and 937 cover comparative effectiveness research and AHRQ's role in the dissemination of that research. I would like GAO to examine the new responsibilities the law creates for AHRQ, particularly whether AHRQ will be able to handle these new responsibilities, and what new information or studies are required by the PPACA.

3. As the above two inquiries demonstrate, recent legislation has increased the size of the role of AHRQ. I would, therefore, like GAO to provide an extensive examination of AHRQ's decision-making process and the method by which it conducts comparative effectiveness research. Specifically, I would like GAO to identify the methodologies and criteria used by AHRQ for topic selection, studies, stakeholder input, and dissemination to the public.

We look forward to discussing this proposed study with you soon. Please contact Republican Committee staff at (202) 225-3641 if you have any questions or concerns about these requests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Joe Barton". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and a cursive "Barton".

Joe Barton
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Henry A. Waxman, Chairman